

Connecting to the Courts *Wisconsin Court System*

| home | search | help | site map | links | questions |



VOLUNTEERS IN THE COURTS *News*

Summer 2000

Wisconsin Court Volunteers Receive National Recognition

Wisconsin's *Volunteers in the Courts Initiative* was singled out as a national model of court/community collaboration in a recent bulletin of the Bureau of Justice Assistance, a division of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). "Opening the Courts to the Community: Volunteers in Wisconsin's Courts" outlines the various types of court-related volunteer programs active throughout the state.

The bulletin divides the state's more than 150 programs into 12 categories, including: alternative dispute resolution, court information and assistance, court ombudsman, domestic violence and sexual assault programs, family services, guardian services, jail and detention center programs, juvenile services, legal services, mentoring programs, probation/parole and community service programs, and victim services. The diversity of programs illustrates the many ways volunteers and courts can come together to better serve the community.

The 19-page bulletin includes profiles of several of the more than 5,000 people who comprise Wisconsin's *Volunteers in the Courts* troops—people like Curt and Elaine Creager, who are volunteers with the Dane County Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) program. They have been advocating for children involved with the courts since 1995.

A grant from DOJ funded the research, which was conducted by political science Professor W. Clinton Terry of Florida International University. Terry visited Wisconsin in 1998 to gather information on how and why the courts use volunteers.

The *Volunteers in the Courts* project was started in 1996 under the direction of then-Justice Shirley S. Abrahamson and then-Chief Justice Roland B. Day to explore including volunteers in court-related work and the practical implications of expanding the role of volunteers in the Wisconsin court system. Since then, the initiative has hosted a series of workshops and a statewide conference, and produced two editions of a catalog of court-related volunteer programs.

The success of these programs and the recognition the state has received is due to the work of people at the local level. "I met a large number of truly wonderful people," Terry said, "all of whom are committed to their volunteer work."

"*Opening the Courts to the Community*" is available online at www.ncjrs.org/pdffiles1/bja/178935.pdf, or by calling the National Criminal Justice Reference Service at (800) 688-4252 (publication number NCJ178935). There is no charge for the bulletin. For a catalog of court-related volunteer programs in the state, visit the court system Web site at www.wicourts.gov/media/pdf/vl_progs.pdf or call the State Bar of Wisconsin at (800) 362-8096.

Courthouse Greeters Help Show the Way

Thousands of people enter the Sheboygan County Courthouse each year to file a legal form, attend a court proceeding, or obtain a marriage license or birth certificate. Until 1998, when the courthouse greeter program was started, finding the right office or even the right building was a challenge. Now when a visitor enters the courthouse he or she might be met by one of 34 volunteer greeters. In two and a half years, these volunteers have assisted more than 21,000 visitors.

The program recruits senior citizens to answer questions and direct courthouse visitors around the courthouse and administration building. It is an important service for those with business in the courthouse and for city and county agencies whose employees were, by default, directing visitors.

The volunteers receive four hours of training, including a tour of the government offices and a list of services they provide, a basic first aid lesson, and telephone orientation. During the training, Greeter

Program Director Pat Hafermann, Sheboygan County Department on Aging, plays up the job's benefits: "It's the one time in your life you can tell the attorneys where to go," she tells the volunteers.

The program was started by the Sheboygan County TRIAD, an association that brings seniors, law enforcement agencies, and the community together to address the needs of the community, especially senior citizens.

A similar program is run by the Dane County Retired Seniors Volunteer Program (RSVP) in the City-County Building in Madison.

As with most volunteer programs, the Sheboygan County Greeter Program is seeking more volunteers. For information on volunteering or to learn more about how to start a greeter program, contact Hafermann at the Sheboygan County Department on Aging at (920) 459-3089.

Law Students Volunteer in Wisconsin's Courts

This summer, 29 law students from schools around the nation are volunteering as interns in 15 county courthouses and the Wisconsin Supreme Court. In its fourth year, the Volunteer Summer Law Student Internship Program continues to provide assistance to trial and appellate judges while also better preparing future lawyers. Since its inception, the program has brought more than 150 students to courts in Wisconsin.

Administered by the Office of Court Operations, the program matches applicants with judges who have requested an intern. This year, 36 judges have been assisted by a student intern (some interns work for more than one judge). The students are given a variety of tasks based on each court's needs, including researching and writing. Many interns also have an opportunity to observe judicial proceedings and shadow legal professionals.

Chief Justice Shirley S. Abrahamson started the project in 1997 by writing letters about the program to law schools nationwide. The internship offers students something that textbooks and classes cannot—a real-life experience of the justice system.

For more information or to participate next year, call the Office of Court Operations at (608) 266-3121.

An Extraordinary Opportunity

by: Cassel McClure

student at DePaul College of Law

Upon completing my second year of law school at DePaul College of Law in Chicago, I applied to the Volunteer Summer Law Student Internship Program. I was given a full-time internship with Chief Justice Shirley S. Abrahamson. It was an extraordinary opportunity.

Last summer I completed an internship with Western Wisconsin Legal Services in Dodgeville. This year I decided to volunteer in the Wisconsin courts because I wanted to continue gaining 'real world' legal experience not available in the classroom setting. I also had interest in pursuing a judicial clerkship upon graduation and felt an internship within the judiciary would help me make that decision. A further incentive for volunteering was the ability to earn course credit toward my law degree.

As an intern I have prepared bench memoranda, observed oral argument, reviewed and discussed opinions from other chambers, assisted in opinion editing, and aided in drafting concurring and dissenting opinions. I have developed my legal writing and research skills as well as expanded my analytical and reasoning abilities. It has also helped to further my understanding and knowledge of important legal subject matter, particularly in the areas of civil procedure and criminal, constitutional, and contract law.

I would encourage all law students to take advantage of the opportunities and experience provided by the Volunteer Summer Law Student Internship Program. It has been invaluable on both a personal and educational level.

Volunteers in the Courts News - Summer 2000

To find out about volunteer opportunities in your community , contact Colleen Flesher, program assistant to the Wisconsin Supreme Court, at (608) 266-1298, or by e-mail at colleen.flesher@wicourts.gov.

This page last updated: December 18, 2003